HOW DID THE WORLD EVOLVE ITSELF?

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY SIR EDMUND BECKETT, Q.C., BEFORE THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE OF LONDON.

(*Continued.*)

Tempting as it is to go on with the exposure of such mischievous and absurd paradoxes, I will confine myself to one more specimen, in quite a different direction. Thus, far we have been learning the history of all things from the imperceptible. But our philosopher is a prophet too, and can even deduce other worlds of happiness and perfection from persistent of force. He tells us how Evolution must proceed through "Equilibration" to final Dissolution and Omnipresent Death (514): and then suddenly cheers us, three pages further on, with the prophetic vision that Evolution can only end in the establishment of the greatest perfection and universal happiness." And this is a piece of genuine inspiration, for he does not even profess to give a word of reason for it. The little that he does say about the scientific future points entirely the other way. For the only possible revival that he contemplates after omnipresent death is the chance of a future collision of some pair of wondering stars, which may generate another indefinite or definite nebula; and then all the same processes may start again. But why that future nebula is to reach any more perfection or happiness than this, or its inhabitants to make any greater "advance towards harmony between man's mental nature and the conditions of his existence," or even why there must be men at all there instead of some other kind of final products of Evolution—is all left in the region of the unfathomable except to the prophet to whom it has been revealed. It certainly is hard upon his disciples to have to be content with his assurance that a future life of happiness and harmony and perfection is in store for somebody else, but only omnipresent and eternal death for them. That however is the common creed of evolutionary cosmogonists and disbelievers in eternal life, in our sense.

PART II.

I think we have had enough of Mr. Spencer for the present, and we can reflect for ourselves on the phenomenon of the intellect of this scientific and conceited age accepting such attempts to find a substitute for the belief of all mankind (until lately), that nothing can have made itself or anything superior to itself; that manifest and admitted contrivances cannot have come without a contriver of them for the purpose which they serve, and of the means of producing them; and that it is little short of lunacy to talk of intelligence being generated out of self-existing matter with no properties by self-existing gravity—if such a force could be. We have now seen that nothing is too absurd, and no reasoning too ludicrous, to be swallowed by those who have abandoned that once universal creed among all people capable of thinking of more than their appetites. I now propose to add a few words on the inference of creative design backwards, from things manifestly being what they would have been if they were designed by an inventor and a power infinitely superior to ourselves.

Some anti-creationists deny that they are, and say that they could themselves have made some things better, though they prudently abstain from saying how, beyond repeating the general proposition that an omnipotent Creator ought, in their opinion, to have made a perfect world, with no evil in it. That proposition also I have discussed elsewhere, and of course do not pretend to explain why we have to wait for perfection in another world. All that has nothing to do with the alternatives of design or no design in this. For again it is necessary to remind people that they have to choose between two only possible alternatives, according to the balance of probabilities. There is no middle way, between the world and all that is in it having been either designed or not designed; and therefore we *ipso facto* believe, and cannot but believe, one just so far as we disbelieve the other. A man may not have made up his mind which to believe, but that man's opinion is worth nothing. In fact he has none: or, so far as he has, he must be wrong, whichever side is right.

Therefore also, a man who denies design, but cannot state any other rational mode of generating the universe, condemns himself. For unquestionably a designing Creator could produce the universe, and therefore must have done it, if nothing else did: and that something else must be capable rational and intelligible description and proof of its capacity for doing the business before we need attend to it. We have seen that the "Apostle of Evolution" cannot make his scheme, or force or whatever he likes to call his self-acting machinery, take a single step towards doing the business, without calling in other forces, of which every one required creating by some "immaterial Reality" or power strong enough to influence all the matter in the universe. And it would be absurd to talk of such a power doing all that without designing it, or making laws of nature in a haphazard, blundering sort of way.

Indeed it is one of the characteristics of the laws of nature that they have no mistakes, and never want amending, as all human laws do constantly. You may say that they sometimes produce failures—imperfect or defective creatures below their normal type, and some too bad to live. But that is only the old argument again in other words, that an omnipotent Creator would have made everything perfect. But, granting that opinion to be *a priori* probable, or worth something in the balancing of probabilities, it comes to very little when weighed against the innumerable facts which tend to prove design; for it is only one guess against the necessary inference from those facts. Moreover, occasional failures in individuals no more prove bad design than occasional failures in any machine or fabric prove it to have been ill-designed, though it may have been ill-made. Where is the contrivance in all nature which we could improve, consistently with the general laws of nature, which laws no one can be so absurd as to fancy that he could mend, or guess at the consequences of any attempt to do so?

Allowing as much gradual improvement as you like by biological Evolution, or the creation of small—or large—changes adapted to changing circumstances, each creature has somehow come to be as well contrived as possible for its own work. And I suppose we may say the same of every organ for the time, though they may have improved in time, owing to causes which are the very things that want explaining, either by a creative power or by whatever else unbelievers in one can invent, without merely calling them "unfathomable mysteries": which only means that they require a Creator.

Professor Clifford perhaps set the fashion of saying that the human eye is so far from being the wonderful and perfect instrument that Paley and others had made out, that it is full of defects. I never could find that he had invented a superior eye himself, which a man who says all that ought to do. But I do find this in Helmholtz's Scientific lectures (p. 227), part of which probably was Clifford's authority. After a detailed explanation of the ocular contrivances, he said:—"The eye has every possible defect that can be found in an optical instrument, and even some that are peculiar to itself; but they are all so counteracted that the inexactness of the images very little exceeds the limits which are set to the delicacy of sensation by the dimensions of the retinal cones (i.e., no more would be any use.) The adaptation of the eye to its functions is therefore most complete, and is seen in the very limits set to its defects. The result, which may have been reached by innumerable generations under the Darwinian law of inheritance, coincides with what the wisest wisdom may have devised beforehand." I leave that to speak for itself.

I read a paper lately by Professor Attfield, trying to account for the rise of sap in trees far above the known limits of either atmospheric pressure of 32 feet for water, or of capillary attraction. His explanation may be right or wrong, we still know nothing of the matter; but if right it means that he has only now discovered the contrivance which has been doing its work perfectly as long as the trees have lived upon the earth and which the spontaneous Evolutionists expect us to believe made itself, without design anywhere. Whether it did so gradually or at once, it equally required inventing and preparing for and developing, like the steam engine or the telephone. Philosophers have been trying to invent it, or rather to explain the invention which the puzzle itself open before them, and have not been able to do it with all their intelligence: and yet we are to believe that it invented itself with none: and that electric eels invented and made themselves ages before any electrical machine was invented by "the highest intelligence" of the anti-creationists; which also made itself out of dead atoms by persistent force.

(*To be Continued.*)

THE STORY-TELLER.

Lady Blanche's Secret.

Lady Blanche Dulcimer was one of the best-dressed women in London. Oddly enough, her love of display and tasteful extravagance did not manifest themselves until she became a widow. The late Colonel Dulcimer had lost a fortune at cards, and the only provision he was able to make for her was by insuring his life for a few thousand pounds. And yet Lady Blanche had no sooner cast off her widow's weeds than she blossomed into a leader of fashion, and excited the envy and admiration of her friends by her costly toilets. How she did it nobody could imagine, for her father was a bankrupt peer, and none of her relatives were in a position to assist her. Her gowns alone must have absorbed the whole of her modest income, at the most moderate estimates, and these were not the only expensive items of personal adornment which she indulged in. It is true that she lived quietly, and did not attempt to entertain; but even a little pill-box of a house in Park street cannot be kept upon nothing, and she certainly went a good deal into society.

"My dear, it is Lebœuf who does it all. She was my maid years ago, you know, and she lets me have my dresses at half price. Of course, it is a very good advertisement for her, for as I go about a great deal, I have got her no end of customers. But she is a good, grateful soul, and strictly *entre nous*, I owe her more money than I can ever hope to pay. It is her way, my dear, of returning my former kindness."

But this explanation was not considered satisfactory. Madame Lebœuf was a fashionable dressmaker, who, during the last few years, had attained some celebrity. Those who had dealings with her unanimously agreed that she was the last person in the world to show consideration to anybody. She was shrewd, and grasping, her prices were enormous, and she had too keen an eye for business to be capable of magnanimity in the direction indicated by Lady Blanche. Her professional skill, however, ensured her a numerous and increasing *clientele*, and as money-lending at usurious interest formed an important branch of her business, she was generally supposed to be making a fortune. But even assuming Lady Blanche had got her gowns for nothing, together with commissions on her purchases made by customers she introduced, she must have been a very good manager indeed to keep up the appearance she did. Of course, people will talk, and the income of one's neighbours is a fruitful topic for idle gossip. It was pretty well known that she was not in debt—at least to tradespeople: and it was easy to calculate that she must be spending two thousand a year if a penny.

Where the deuce does she get it from? inquired the old women of the male sex, talking confidentially among themselves at their clubs, perhaps Leytonstone could tell us something if he liked.

It was certainly the fact that Lord Leytonstone was paying the widow a good deal of attention in a cautious way, but no one seriously believed the implied scandal. To begin with, Lady Blanche had an unblemished reputation, and was by no means addicted to flirtation. She confessed to forty a very damaging admission—and, though decidedly handsome, she could hardly be called fascinating. Her manner was much too brusque to to be agreeable, and she was generally regarded as a clever woman whom it was wise to keep on good terms with. Lord Leytonstone, too, was not the sort of a man to compromise himself with the opposite sex. He was an elderly peer who had been fast in his youth, but had sobered down into a model of propriety. It was generally supposed that he was on the look-out for a rich wife, his own fortune being in a very impoverished state.

The real truth was that his lordship was as much mystified as the rest of the world. His matrimonial aspirations had induced him to make careful inquiries regarding the circumstances of Lady Blanche. He soon ascertained the extent of the income she derived from her late husband, and satisfied himself that she had no other visible means of subsistence. His experience caused him to disbelieve utterly in the alleged benevolence of Madame Lebœuf. He was, therefore, even more puzzled than other people to account for Lady Blanche's apparent affluence. When he called at her house he noted with a watchful eye the signs of comfort and luxury by which she was surrounded. A man who is nursing a heavily mortgaged estate by practising the most rigid economy can quickly perceive and appreciate lavish expenditure. As he sat sipping tea in the widow's cosy drawing-room he came to the conclusion that her prosperity was real and substantial, and resolved that it might be worth while to cultivate her aquaintance. In accordance with this determination, Lord Leytonstone became a very frequent visitor at Park street, keeping his eyes and ears open, but taking good care not to commit himself. The widow was evidently flattered by his attentions, but, on her part, she was hardly less cautious. Not a word or a hint did she let drop which might give him a clue to the secret he wished to fathom, and enable him to decide whether it would be prudent to make her an offer of marriage.

One morning he called upon her unexpectedly with the offer of a friend's box at the opera. As he entered he met a small, plump, brisk little person, at whom he cast an inquisitive glance as she passed him in the hall. Her veil was down, but Lord Leytonstone caught a glimpse of a pair of very dark eyes, which seemed familiar.

"May I ask who the lady was I met in the hall as I came in?" enquired his lordship, casually, of Lady Blanche, when he had discharged his mission.

"Was she small and dark? It must have been Madame Lebœuf," answered the hostess.

"Oh, the Madame Lebœuf, I suppose," he remarked, pleasantly, as he took up his hat.

"Yes; the great Madame Lebœuf; she came to consult me about my dress for the drawing-room. I am especially favoured, you see, for Lebœuf always calls upon me, whereas other people have to dance attendance upon her," said Lady Blanche, with conscious pride.

"Remarkably condescending of her," observed Lord Leytonstone, looking the widow straight in the face. "I've heard she generally gives herself the airs of a wealthy dowager."

"Oh, but it's gratitude, you know," said Lady Blanche, rather quickly, as she turned aside from his lordship's scrutinising gaze; "she was my maid, and those foreigners are always so devoted and warm-hearted."

"Yes, very; particularly middle-aged Frenchwomen," said his lordship drily.

Lady Blanche, who was quick-tempered, seemed vexed at her visitor's tone; but before she could speak, Lord Leytonstone had suddenly seized her hand, and was lifting it gravely to his lips.

"I will not be behind the Lebœuf in paying special homage to Lady Blanche Dulcimer," he said jocosely, as he bowed himself out of the room.

It was evident that Lord Leytonstone was in an unusually good humor. His stiff and pompous manner relaxed as he descended the stairs, and when he reached the street he began to twirl his dyed moustache and to hum a fragment of a lively French *chansonette* in an undertone.

"Gad!" he muttured to himself, breaking off in the midst of the refrain; "it makes one feel quite young again, and yet it must be twenty years ago at least. She wears well, *la petite* Ernestine.

After another short burst of melody his lordship again commenced unconsciously to shape his thoughts into words.

"I will call and pay my respects to madame. I begin to suspect that Lady Blanche is even a cleverer woman than I imagined, and, by gad, if my suspicions are correct, I will propose before I'm a day older."

Lord Leytonstone's reflections kept him in good spirits for the rest of the day, and soon after eight he started off in a hansom to an address in Bond street, and was set down at the door of Madame Lebœuf's atelier. He was ushered into a handsomely furnished apartment on the first floor, where he amused himself by studying with complacence the reflection of his well-preserved face and figure in the numerous mirrors until the door opened, and a swarthy little lady, with a moustache and very dark eyes, bustled into a room.

"Milor Leytonstone?" she said, inquiringly, glancing at the card she held in her hand, and stumbling over each syllable in the name.

"Ernestine!" said his lordship, with a transparent attempt at sentiment.

"Oh, it is you, Monsieur Barringham?" exclaimed Madame Lebœuf, quite calmly.

"Yes. We used to *tu-toi* once upon a time, madame, but that was when we were both younger," remarked his lordship, pressing the plump hand which was extended to him.

"Were you not at Lady Blanche Dulcimer's today?" inquired Madame Lebœuf, glancing at him curiously.

"Yes. I passed you in the hall as I entered," said his lordship; "I knew you again at once. That is more than you can say of me."

"I did not recognise you, milor; but I had forgotten that you were no longer young even when I knew you," returned Madame Lebœuf, frankly.